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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRASILIA 12312

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR  
TAGS: PGOV, BR  
SUBJ: CODEL RICHARDSON--CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT  
FIGUEIREDO

1. (C- ENTIRE TEXT.)

2. SUMMARY: PRESIDENT FIGUEIREDO SPOKE WITH WIT OF THE IRONIES OF BRAZIL AND ITS POLITICS. BRAZILIANS WANT DEMOCRACY BUT HAVE TROUBLE ACCEPTING POLITICAL PARTIES AND COMPETITION AS THE WAY IT IS PRACTICED. IN THE SUCCESSION PROCESS, THOUGH, PRINCIPLES ARE BEING ESTABLISHED WHICH WILL ENDURE AFTER THIS GENERATION OF LEADERS PASSES ON. THE NEXT GOVERNMENT IS NAIVE IN EXPECTING TO FIND EASY SOLUTIONS TO THE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS WHICH THIS ONE COULDN'T FIND. IN THE FIRST EIGHT MONTHS IT WILL HAVE TROUBLE WITH ALL THE POLITICIANS WHO WILL WANT THEIR CHANCE AT THE TROUGH AFTER TWENTY YEARS OUT OF POWER. AFTER THAT THE PROSPECTS FOR THE NEXT GOVERNMENT ARE THAT IT MAY BE A REASONABLY GOOD ONE. HE SEEMS RECONCILED TO, PERHAPS EVEN CONTENT WITH, THE TRANSFER OF POWER TO THE OPPOSITION AS THE OUTCOME OF HIS MISSION TO MAKE BRAZIL A DEMOCRACY. END SUMMARY.

3. DECEMBER 12: CONGRESSMAN WILLIAM RICHARDSON, TOP LAWYER, FORMER TALKER ON THE HISPANIC CHANNEL AND THE AMBASSADOR AND CONTROL OFFICER MET WITH PRESIDENT JOAO FIGUEIREDO WHO WAS ALONE. IN A CONVERSATION OF MORE THAN AN HOUR, TWENTY MINUTES MORE THAN THE TIME SCHEDULED, THE PRESIDENT PLAINLY ENJOYED THE OPPORTUNITY TO TALK FREELY, MOSTLY IN SPANISH, TO AMERICAN CONGRESSMEN OF HISPANIC ORIGIN. THROUGHOUT HE LACED HIS INSIGHTS INTO THE FOIBLES OF BRAZILIANS, THEIR LEADERS AND POLITICS AND LANGUAGE WITH A SARDONIC WIT WE HAVE NOT OFTEN HEARD FROM HIM BEFORE. HE APPEARED TO BE IN A MORE RELAXED AND CHEERFUL MOOD THAN IN CONVERSATIONS WITH AMERICANS EARLIER THIS YEAR. HIS RESENTMENT TOWARD POLITICIANS CAME OUT, BUT WAS SOFTENED THIS TIME BY AMUSEMENT WITH THE IRONIES OF BRAZILIAN POLITICS.

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4. BEFORE GETTING TO SUBSTANCE WE WERE TREATED TO TWENTY MINUTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S OBSERVATIONS ABOUT BRAZILIANS, (SOME VERY FUNNY BUT UNPRINTABLE) PROMPTED BY THE HISPANIC ORIGINS OF HIS VISITORS: SOME WORDS HAVE ENTIRELY DIFFERENT MEANINGS IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE COUNTRY, INNOCENT IN ONE AND LEWD ELSEWHERE (HE GAVE EXAMPLES), SO THAT ONE IS SAFER SAYING NOTHING. BRAZILIANS WILL TELL YOU THEY HAVE NO RACIAL PREJUDICE, AND STILL SAY THEY DON'T LIKE BLACKS. ONLY IN BAHIA IS THERE LITTLE PREJUDICE BECAUSE ALMOST EVERYONE IS BLACK. BUT BRAZILIANS FOR ALL THEIR QUIRKS ARE GOOD PEOPLE; THEY ARE BADLY SERVED BY ALL OF US WHO ARE NOT AS GOOD AS THEY ARE, BUT FIND THEMSELVES THEIR LEADERS.

5. ON OTHER MATTERS THE PRESIDENT MADE THE FOLLOWING POINTS:

DEMOCRACY. BRAZILIANS, DESPITE THEMSELVES, WERE MOVING IRREVERSIBLY TOWARD DEMOCRACY. THIS WOULD MEAN DEVELOPING INSTITUTIONS AND HABITS THAT WOULD ENDURE AFTER THE PRESENT "PUTRID" POLITICAL LEADERSHIP PASSES ON. WHAT TODAY'S POLITICIANS CAN'T UNDERSTAND IS THAT A FUNCTIONING DEMOCRACY MUST BE BASED ON POLITICAL PARTIES AND COMPETITION THAT IS DECIDED BY A FREE VOTE.

BRAZILIAN POLITICIANS HAD NO SENSE OF THE MEANING OF A PARTY; EACH LOOKS OUT FOR HIS OWN SKIN. THEY ARE VERY FICKLE. IMAGINE, HE SAID, IF IN THE UNITED STATES THOSE WHO LOST IN THE REPUBLICAN CONVENTION ALL WENT OVER TO THE DEMOCRATS. THAT IS WHAT HAPPENED HERE. SENATOR SARNEY (WHOM HE DID NOT MENTION BY NAME) WAS PRESIDENT OF THE PDS ONE DAY AND CANDIDATE OF THE PMDB THE NEXT. THEY FAVOR DIRECT ELECTIONS AND THEN OPPOSE THEM. THE PDS CANDIDATE (HE NEVER MENTIONED MALUF'S NAME EITHER) OPPOSED DIRECT ELECTIONS AND NOW PROPOSES THEM.

THE POLITICIANS ALL SAID THEY WANTED DEMOCRACY, BUT THEY WANTED ME, HE SAID, TO PICK MY CANDIDATE AND HAVE HIM ELECTED. THAT IS THE WAY IT WAS DONE IN THE PAST; IT WAS NOT DEMOCRACY. I SAID THE PARTY WOULD CHOOSE ITS OWN CANDIDATE THROUGH COMPETITION; I WOULD NOT INTERFERE. THE POLITICIANS GOT MAD AT ME FOR NOT

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TELLING THEM WHAT TO DO. I DID SAY THEY HAD BETTER CHOOSE WELL, BECAUSE I WOULD ACCEPT WHOEVER THEY CHOSE BUT HE AND THE PARTY WOULD HAVE TO WIN ON THEIR OWN. THEY CHOSE (BADLY HE IMPLIED) AND NOW BLAME ME FOR THE CONSEQUENCES. BUT IN THE PROCESS UNDERWAY THE FUNDAMENTALS OF A WORKING DEMOCRACY ARE BEGINNING TO BE ESTABLISHED. THERE IS A GOOD CHANCE THEY WILL DEVELOP AND ENDURE AS THIS GENERATION OF LEADERS PASSES ON AND THE NEXT TRULY ACCEPTS THE WAYS OF DEMOCRACY IN PRACTICE.

THE NEXT GOVERNMENT. FIGUEIREDO DID NOT QUARREL WITH CONGRESSMAN RICHARDSON'S "ASSUMPTION" THAT TANCREDO NEVES (WHOSE NAME THE PRESIDENT NEVER MENTIONED) WOULD BE THE NEXT PRESIDENT. THE "NEW GROUP" SOUNDED VERY NAIVE. THEY SPEAK OF REDUCING INFLATION, INCREASING GROWTH AND EMPLOYMENT ALL AT ONCE. WHEN THEY COME IN THEY WILL NOT FIND SOLUTIONS TO THESE PROBLEMS WE COULDN'T FIND.

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THE "NEW GROUP" WOULD HAVE REAL TROUBLE AT THE BEGINNING. THE WHOLE CROWD THAT HAS BEEN ON THE OUTSIDE FOR TWENTY YEARS IS WAITING ANXIOUSLY TO GET BACK AT THE TROUGH TO RAKE OFF FOR THEMSELVES ALL THEY CAN AND FAST. THEIR EXPECTATIONS ARE INSATIABLE AND THIS WILL BE TROUBLE FOR THE NEXT GOVERNMENT FOR ABOUT EIGHT MONTHS. AFTER THAT PERIOD IT SHOULD BE ABLE TO SETTLE ITSELF AND MAY COME OUT RATHER WELL. THE PROSPECTS FOR THE NEXT GOVERNMENT ARE NOT BAD OVER THE LONGER TERM.

POLITICS. FOR A MILITARY MAN, COMING INTO POLITICAL POWER WAS A SHOCK. THE THINGS ONE HAD TO DO IN EXERCISING POLITICAL POWER SEEMED UNSAVORY TO ONE WHOSE LIFE HAD BEEN WITH MILITARY TRADITION. MILITARY OFFICERS WHO BECOME SUCCESSFUL POLITICIANS GO THROUGH A HALF WAY HOUSE IN MAKING THE TRANSITION. I CAME, HE SAID, STRAIGHT FROM THE BARRACKS TO HIGH POLITICAL OFFICE. I STILL DO NOT LIKE POLITICS OR UNDERSTAND IT.

COMMUNISTS. IN RESPONSE TO CONGRESSMAN LANTOS' OBSERVATION THAT BRAZIL WAS NOT ENGAGED IN THE BATTLE WITH TOTALITARIANISM IN THE WORLD, AS IT SHOULD BE, FIGUEIREDO DISCUSSED COMMUNISM IN BRAZIL AT LENGTH. (COMMENT: HE MAY NOT HAVE UNDERSTOOD THE INTERNATIONAL THRUST OF THE CONGRESSMAN'S POINT.) BRAZIL'S COMMUNISTS ALWAYS WERE A RISK NOT TO BE OVERLOOKED. WHILE THERE WERE NOT THAT MANY, THEY WORKED EFFECTIVELY WITHIN THE NON-COMMUNIST LEFT OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM. THEY WERE HARD WORKING AND ABLE AND THE LEFT WAS NAIVE IN ASSUMING THEY WERE HARMLESS. THIS WAS THE DANGER SINCE THE "LEFT" WAS FASHIONABLE AND UNWITTING; IT WAS UNFASHIONABLE TO BE CONSERVATIVE OR MODERATE. "MY GOOD FRIEND, ROBERTO MARINHO" (TV AND NEWSPAPER MAGNATE) FIGUEIREDO CONTINUED, DOES NOTHING ABOUT COMMUNISTS IN HIS ORGANIZATION BECAUSE THEY ARE GOOD PROFESSIONALS.

EUROPEAN SOCIALISM WAS WELL AWARE OF THE DANGER OF COMMUNISTS, BUT THEIR COUNTERPARTS IN BRAZIL WERE NOT. BRIZOLA IS NOT A COMMUNIST, FIGUEIREDO STRESSED, BUT AN OPPORTUNIST WHO THEY COULD TRY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF. (BRIZOLA'S NAME HE SAID SEVERAL TIMES WITHOUT THE RESENTMENT IMPLIED FOR UNMENTIONABLE PDS POLITICIANS; TWO DAYS LATER HE WAS WARMLY RECEIVED BY BRIZOLA IN RIO. FIGUEIREDO TOLD THE PRESS THERE THAT GOVERNOR BRIZOLA "CLASPS MY HAND MORE WARMLY THAN MY FRIENDS IN THE PDS".)

MOST POLITICIANS AND THE MILITARY ARE ANTI-COMMUNISTS, AND ARE WATCHFUL THAT COMMUNISTS DO NOT GAIN STRENGTH (I AM OPPOSED TO LEGALIZATION OF COMMUNIST PARTIES) OR COME INTO POWERFUL POSITIONS. BRAZIL COULD MOVE LEFT FOR A TIME, BUT THE COMMUNISTS WILL PROBABLY NOT BECOME POWERFUL. IT IS A CONCERN, THOUGH.

6. COMMENT: IN THIS CONVERSATION WE GAINED THE IMPRESSION THAT FIGUEIREDO HAS ACCEPTED THE TRANSITION TO AN OPPOSITION SUCCESSOR AND EXPECTS IT TO TAKE PLACE WITHOUT TRAUMA. HE SEEMS RECONCILED TO, EVEN CONTENT WITH, THE LIKELY OUTCOME OF HIS MISSION TO MAKE BRAZIL A DEMOCRACY.

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7. THE PRESIDENT WAS PLAINLY TOUCHED BY THE CONGRESSMEN'S GIFT OF PICTURES DRAWN BY YOUNG AMERICANS OF

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HISPANIC DESCENT. HE PROMISED TO WRITE EACH ARTIST  
A LETTER OF APPRECIATION. FIGUEIREDO DOES NOT SUPPRESS  
HIS HUMAN VULNERABILITIES AND EMOTIONS; HE DOES NOT  
PUT ON THE WORLDLY AIRS OF A LEADER OF A GREAT NATION.  
THE REPORTING OFFICER FOUND FIGUEIREDO FAR MORE  
APPEALING THAN PDS POLITICIANS PRESENTLY DO. OPPOSITION  
POLITICAL LEADERS, ON THE OTHER HAND, ARE DISCOVERING  
THEY LIKE HIM TOO, AS THEY ARE INDICATING BOTH PUBLICLY  
AND PRIVATELY. AFTER A BITTER YEAR, THE PRESIDENT MAY  
FINISH HIS TERM WITH THE POPULARITY HE BELIEVES HE  
DESERVES. END COMMENT.  
WATSON

END OF MESSAGE

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